

AUGUST 24, 1972

Rain has continued to fall on the Shortgrass Country. Every evening, thunderclouds have built up in some part or the other. North of San Angelo, one rancher complained of needing some more rain to round off the 7 inches he'd received. I think, however, he hit it lucky before the first shower dried up.

San Angelo took the lead over the rest of the area. Telephone service was overloaded with reports of rains on lawns and sidewalks. For some time the city had been a dry spot, even though professional cloudseeders were summering there. Close to town, conditions were good, but within the corporate perimeters the clouds were thin and stingy. It seemed impossible for it to rain at the weather station.

The obvious lack of rainfall was becoming a sensitive point among San Angelo citizens. Several of my compadres there were careful to conceal that the town site was missing out on the moisture.

So when it did rain, Angeloans began to brag that the hired cloudseeders had left, yet the city was receiving more rain than anywhere else around.

The local newspaper made a big story about the rainmakers leaving a few hours before the rain fell. If the paper hadn't made such a fuss, outlanders wouldn't have noticed they were trying so hard to imply that they'd finally got a rain from the Heavenly Rainmaker.

Their purpose was too obvious. It'd been four or five years since they could be sure whether their rain was coming from natural causes or artificial ones. It doesn't take a brilliant theologian to analyze that sort of situation.

In the 1950s the city fathers wore out a trail going to Washington for aid to build dams to stop the risk of flooding. In the '60s the reigning aldermen broke the city treasury trying to get some drinking water for the town.

San Angeloans grew so water crazy that every time I'd go to town all they could talk about was how they hoped we'd get a flood at the ranch so their lakes would fill up.

The only fair way to answer that was to tell them that we hoped they'd get a big windstorm so they'd have something on their minds besides us washing away.

When one area like San Angelo has floods followed by an acute water shortage, I don't see that the message is hard to understand, do you? Short of writing a script on a slab of rock, the Maker can't make His thoughts any clearer. I guess He could have burned a bush on the mountains outside of town, but chances are everybody would have been too busy playing golf or bridge to see the fire.

Last week when I was caught in the floods between Sonora and Del Rio, I did a lot of thinking on this subject. Among the crowd of stranded motorists there was a retired butcher.

I began to consider how much water this ex-meat cutter had squirted into hams and chickens before they were passed across his scales. It didn't take me long to decide to move my car to higher ground. Conditions looked perfect for a subtle way to call for a divine payoff. I didn't want to be part of a news story centered on a sudden wave that washed a bunch of folks down the creek.

These last rains have put the old country on a growing boom. Markets have improved and a man would have to be mighty greedy to ask for more than we already have